

MAIN STREET MONTANA PROJECT

A BUSINESS PLAN *For Montana by Montanans*

KIN RECOMMENDATION 4

Stakeholders identify and resolve state water resource issues relative to agriculture economic development by:

- **Streamlining and improving new permitting and water right change process and other water issues**
- **Increase coordination between agencies and decrease cross-agency interference**
- **Opening the availability of conservation districts water reservations and new water right permits where water is available**
- **Creating predictability in accessing water through a transparent process and an understanding of all sides of the issue**

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BENEFIT

- **Resolving permitting issues would improve MT producers' ability to plan and maximize their water use efficiencies**
- **Irrigation system enhancements would allow new production**

*Revised
1/5/2017*

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PROBLEM STATEMENT 4

Water-Use Issues Hamper Food and Agriculture Industry Development

Access to water resources can increase production yields and enhance agricultural development. Montana is a headwaters state with robust water resources. The state and local conservation districts could provide more clarity on water resources that are available and how to obtain them for beneficial use. New permits, change of use, and points of diversion for agriculture development are at times protested by some state agencies. Montana's water adjudication process is still not complete but is now on track to be completed. Further, the state could provide incentives to upgrade irrigation systems to more efficient technologies that consume less water.

By enhancing the use of available water resources and using existing resources more efficiently by upgrading irrigation infrastructure, agricultural producers will be able to increase yields and preserve water resources. A study conducted by in 2006 by ECONorthwest, *Irrigation in Montana – Program Overview and Economic Analysis*, estimated that in the lower Yellowstone Valley non-irrigated land is valued between \$350 and \$475 per acre, while irrigated land may be valued as high as \$4,000 per acre.